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TAGS: [PREL](#) [GPGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: BARHAM SALIH ON CORRUPTION, IRAQI UNITY

¶1. (C) Senators Inouye and Stevens met on 26 November with Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih to discuss GOI corruption and the future of the U.S. presence in Iraq. Salih acknowledged serious institutionalized corruption, but said the GOI was working to establish effective oversight mechanisms in conjunction with the U.S. and international community. On the U.S.-Iraq relationship, Sen. Stevens warned Salih that U.S. public patience with Iraqi infighting is running thin, and that Iraqis must unite before U.S. policymakers draw forces significantly down. Salih took the point, but argued that both the complexity of Iraq's problems and the potential impact of this conflict across the region warrant a U.S. commitment to stay the course. End summary.

GOI CORRUPTION: WIDESPREAD BUT SALVAGEABLE

¶2. (C) Salih attributed Iraq's corruption problems to a political elite that depends on it for sustenance, a long history in which corruption has been an accepted fact of life, and the inevitability of graft in any society in transition. He said the GOI had developed a reasonably professional auditing capability, thanks in part to help from the U.S., UN, and World Bank, but that past efforts to police the ministries had been vulnerable to politicization towards both Sunnis and Shia. Salih is organizing a GOI & corruption conference to include the heads of relevant ministries and various representatives of the international community, which he hopes will take place around December 15.

IRAQIS MUST UNIFY OR RISK LOSING U.S. SUPPORT

¶3. (C) Sen. Stevens warned that his constituents, patience was running out with the Iraqis, seeming inability to unify, and estimated the GOI had 18 months to establish order before voters would force a significant reduction in the U.S. presence. He suggested Iraq might take a lesson from Israel, which has weathered decades of violence within its borders by remaining internally cohesive. Salih thanked the Senator for his candor, but said it was unrealistic Iraq would stabilize within 18 months and expressed hope the U.S. would see the mission through to completion. He recognized the Coalition cannot maintain its current numbers indefinitely, but encouraged more serious discussion on a sustainable long-term posture.

¶4. (C) Salih continued that Iraq's disunity is deep-seated, noting that for Kurds and Shia the word &Iraq had historically signified an external threat, not an identity. Iraqis from all ethnicities and sects, however, are realizing their vulnerability to instability and foreign intervention in the absence of a unified state. Repeatedly Salih said Iraq's troubles are not only internal, but due to intervention by its neighbors and al-Qa'ida, and that solutions to all the Middle East's problems depend in part

on the outcome in Iraq. Finally, Salih hailed this year,s successful security surge, and called for a political surge of comparable intensity to break the deadlock in the GOI.

15. (U) Codel Inouye did not have an opportunity to clear this cable before departing Baghdad.

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